Beyond Units: Governance and Non-Governance of University Commons

Session 2: University Units, Governance and Creativity

Symposium “University Governance: Impeding or Facilitating Creativity?”
HERCuLES Group of the Academia Europea, INCHER Kassel, Volkswagen Stiftung

Jetta Frost and Fabian Hattke
Universität Hamburg

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Point of departure: How can governance create universities which are more than the sum of their parts?

Universities as loosely coupled systems: “set[s] of activities held together by common parking lots” (Mintzberg/Rose 2003: 286)

Focus on the “parts”:
Single researchers and their creativity, effort and tenacity (skills, talent, originality, elaboration, lateral thinking)

From individual rationality to collective action:
Governance as capacity to act collectively
“But why should it [the university] be more than the sum [of its parts] in the first place?

Because, first, doing good research is - today more than ever - the result of cooperation.

And second, today’s academic system has grown so much that even the wealthiest [...] ‘comprehensive university’, will not be able to avoid setting a strategic course, specifically, deciding for or against policy options for the future. The ‘parts’ require rules on collective action to get things right.”

Kurt Imboden (2016: 678)
Head of the expert commission evaluating the German excellence initiative
Governing collective action is one of the most important challenges within modern pluralistic organizations.

**Pluralistic organizations**
- constituted by fragmented collectives, by multiple actors with diverse objectives
- great degrees of individual autonomy

**Collective action**
- pursuit of a goal by more than one actor
- voluntary involvement
- provision and use of university-specific public goods through collaboration

“tighten” up loosely coupled structures, rules, norms, standards, peer control, joint decision-making.
University commons provide the strategic basis for pursuing certain activities under the shared roof of the whole organization

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<th>Degree of rivalry</th>
<th>Degree of excludability</th>
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<td>High</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 Private resources</td>
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<td>encapsulated in service-level agreements</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<td>2 Pool resources</td>
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<td>shared services (e.g. open access support, legal services)</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<td>3 Club resources</td>
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<td>e.g. interdisciplinary graduate schools, research proposal expertise</td>
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<td>4 Pure public resources</td>
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<td>strategic course (e.g. for a sustainable future), organizational culture, reputation</td>
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From voluntary collective action to organized collaboration? Dilemmas of commons and implications for governance

**Commons are not beneficial per se**
(Buchanan, 1965; Hardin, 1998; Kollock, 1998; Samuelson, 1954; Ostrom, 1997)

- **Dilemma of over-use**
  - Exploitation of pool resources
- **Dilemma of under-use**
  - Limited access to club resources
- **Dilemma of under-supply**
  - Social loafing when creating pure public resources

**Governance: voluntary versus organized**
(Frost & Hattke, 2013; Frost, Vogel & Bagban, 2016; Hattke, Blaschke, & Frost, 2016)

- Governance mechanisms are substitutive, not additive
  - Crowding out of voluntary contributions
- Effectiveness of governance mechanisms depends on the field of action
  - Contingency approach to governance
Discussion: How governance can create universities which are more than the sum of their parts

Effectiveness in the provision and use of commons

Non-governance → Governance ← Non-governance

Self-blocking collegialism → Checks and balances ← Micro-controlling managerialism
Organized irresponsibility → Informed judgeability ← Individualized accountability
Contact information

Prof. Dr. Jetta Frost
Vice-President, responsible for HRM
Professor for Organization and Management
University of Hamburg
Mailto: jetta.frost@wiso.uni-hamburg.de

Dr. Fabian Hattke
Interim Professor
University of Hamburg, Chair of Organization and Management
Associate Member
University of Zurich, Center for Higher Education and Science Studies (CHESS)
Mailto: fabian.hattke@wiso.uni-hamburg.de

Website: https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fachbereich-sozoek/professuren/frost.html
Weblog: www.science-studies.com